
Government of the District of Columbia



Metropolitan Police Department

Testimony of
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Chief of Police

***Public Oversight Hearing on
The Metropolitan Police Department***

Committee on the Judiciary
Phil Mendelson, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia

November 10, 2005

Council Chamber
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Chairperson Mendelson, other members of the Committee, staff and guests – I appreciate this opportunity to update the Committee on the Metropolitan Police Department’s progress, since our last performance hearing, in such critical areas as neighborhood safety, juvenile crime, traffic safety, and staffing and organization. A copy of my prepared statement is being posted on our Department’s website, www.mpdc.dc.gov.

In the area of neighborhood safety, the trends continue to be very encouraging. Official Uniform Crime Reports show that serious crime in the District declined by 18 percent from 2003 to 2004. This followed a nearly 9 percent reduction in crime between 2002 and 2003. There were 33,171 serious, or Part I, crimes (excluding arsons) reported to the police during 2004. This represents the lowest number of crimes reported in a single year since the current UCR reporting program began back in 1965, and the lowest violent and property crime rates in 35 years. There were reductions last year in every major crime category, including a 20 percent decline in homicides.

The good news on crime reduction has continued into calendar year 2005 as well. Preliminary statistics show that, through the first 10 months of the year, serious crime is down almost 8 percent citywide when compared with the same period of 2004. Every major crime category is down again this year except one – robbery, which I will discuss a little later in my testimony. There have been double-digit reductions this year in sexual assaults, burglaries and stolen autos. The preliminary data also show that crime is down this year in all seven police districts. This suggests that both our citywide crime reduction strategies as well as our localized community policing efforts are having an impact in neighborhoods throughout the city.

As I did during my testimony in March, I want to publicly salute the men and women of the Metropolitan Police Department, as well as our partners in the community, for their outstanding effort in bringing about these dramatic – and sustained – reductions in crime. Our city and our neighborhoods are safer today because of their dedication, creativity and hard work.

This hard work is reflected in some of our key activity indicators, including arrests and firearm recoveries. From 2003 to 2004, the number of adults arrested in DC increased by more than 14 percent, to nearly 47,000. Through the first 10 months of this year, arrest totals have generally remained at the high, 2004 level. In addition, our officers have already recovered more than 2,000 firearms so far this year. This year’s figure is 17 percent higher than the comparable number for 2004. This represents about 300 additional firearms taken off our streets this year. Our officers have also served approximately 3,800 arrest warrants this year.

Recent reductions in crime have also coincided with the ongoing development of our crime-fighting strategies and tactics. These include our Daily Crime Briefings in which crime patterns are pinpointed and strategies developed; the continued focus on our crime “hot spots;” the long-awaited launch of our Border Patrol initiative with Prince George’s County; the development of specialized crime-fighting strategies in our districts, and the continuing results from our Police Service Area (or

PSA) realignment. Today, the Metropolitan Police Department is identifying crime problems more quickly and more accurately; we are responding with greater precision and agility; and we are following through with more accountability than ever before. And the results, in terms of crime reduction and neighborhood safety, continue to be impressive.

As I mentioned, robbery is the only major crime that is showing an increase this year. Robberies are up by about 4 percent citywide, according to preliminary statistics, driven by a spike that began in late August. I am very concerned about recent robbery trends for two reasons: first, the increases have occurred in many parts of the city, and second, robbery is such an unpredictable crime – it can easily turn into a shooting or even a homicide.

In response to these trends, each police district has developed robbery plans that target the specific problem, and problem areas, within their districts. We have also put together a robbery squad that is concentrating primarily on the Third District, which has experienced approximately 1,000 robberies already this year. This squad is working to link unsolved crimes, and identify and apprehend the most active offenders. To enlist the support of the community, I recently announced an increase in the reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any robbery suspect in the District: up to \$5,000 in most cases; up to \$10,000 if the crime involved serious injury to the victim. We have already begun to see some improvements in robbery trends in the last couple of weeks, and I am confident that these and other measures will help us get the robbery problem in our city under control.

Another area that I remain concerned about is juvenile crime. In fact, it appears that juvenile offenders may be one of the key factors driving the spike in robberies over the past two months.

Some of the trends in juvenile crime are encouraging, however. For example, the number of juveniles murdered in the District has fallen sharply this year, after spiking in 2004. As of today, there have been 11 young people age 17 or younger murdered in DC. That compares to 23 at this time last year. And of the 11 victims this year, three were young children or infants who were killed by family members or other caregivers. Eleven juvenile homicides is still 11 too many in my mind, but we have successfully reversed last year's particularly violent trend.

I am also encouraged by the fact that the number of juveniles arrested for crimes has actually fallen by about 5 percent this year. While arrest numbers are an imprecise measure, they do provide some indication of juvenile involvement in crime. And so far this year, we have seen substantial reductions in juvenile arrests for crimes such as unauthorized use of a vehicle and theft. What is disturbing, however, is that while overall juvenile arrests are down, arrests for robbery and weapons offenses are up sharply among juveniles. To me, this suggests that juvenile involvement in these more serious and dangerous crimes may be on the rise.

We are working to reverse this trend through a variety of prevention, intervention and enforcement strategies. For example, MPD officers have picked up more than 2,800 curfew violators so far this year, or over twice the total from all of 2004. In addition, officers have picked up approximately 2,300 truants this calendar year, also an increase. Our goal with both curfew and truancy enforcement is to get young people off the streets during times when they are most vulnerable to crime, as either victims or offenders.

Still, juvenile crime is a serious concern today. And it will continue to be a serious concern in the future, as the juvenile population is expected to increase by 24 percent over the next two decades. We need to put some things in place today, so that we can be better positioned to address the challenge of juvenile crime in the future.

As I testified before the House Government Reform Committee last month, we will need some additional reforms – particularly in the area of information sharing – if we are to stay ahead of the curve in the years to come. Currently, the MPD is not receiving critical information that I believe would assist us in our mission of protecting young people and safeguarding communities. For example, when young offenders are assigned to group homes or given home detention, I feel strongly that our police officers have a right to know who those young people are, where they have been sent, what their juvenile history is, and any conditions on their release. We should also be informed immediately when juveniles abscond from any facility in the juvenile justice system and when there is any change in a juvenile's status. In the interest of protecting our communities – and, in many cases, protecting young people themselves – our police officers need to have access to basic information about juvenile offenders in our neighborhoods. We will be working with the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services and the courts to address data-sharing issues.

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I continue to be encouraged by our performance in the area of traffic safety as well. I realize that the issue of impaired driving has received a lot of attention in recent weeks. Unfortunately, that discussion has, in some ways, overshadowed the larger gains we have made in roadway safety.

Traffic fatalities in our city hit a 20-year low in 2004. In fact, the District of Columbia registered the largest percentage decrease in traffic fatalities of any state, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. So far this year, fatalities are tracking at the same low rate that we experienced in 2004.

Improvements in traffic safety have been the result of a number of enforcement initiatives, both traditional and automated. As part of the regional Checkpoint Strikeforce initiative, we have been conducting at least one sobriety checkpoint a week in various parts of the city. Our procedures at these checkpoints have been updated to support recent changes in our impaired driving laws. Over the summer, the MPD once again participated in the regional Smooth Operator campaign against

aggressive drivers. In all, our Department issued nearly 92,000 citations during the four enforcement “waves.”

The incidence of red-light running is down more than 60 percent at locations equipped with intersection safety cameras. And aggressive speeding in our photo radar enforcement zones has plummeted from nearly 1 in 3 motorists speeding excessively at the start of the program, to just 1 in 33 motorists in recent months. The data show that our overall reduction in traffic fatalities has been driven by a sharp decline in the number of fatalities in which speeding was the primary contributing factor. There were 38 such speeding-related fatalities in 2001, the first year of our photo radar program. In 2004, there were just 17, a reduction of 55 percent. So I am very proud of our performance in traffic safety and very pleased that our work has contributed to saving lives.

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In terms of organization and staffing, the Department has been able to sustain much of the progress I have reported on during previous hearings. Our sworn staffing continues at close to our authorized level of 3,800. Between attrition and the normal process for hiring new officers, we will almost always be slightly below the threshold of 3,800, but we are working very hard to keep our numbers as close as possible to that figure.

We have continued to make progress in ensuring that more of our sworn members are available for full duty, and not on extended sick leave or limited duty status. Compared with a year ago, we have cut the number of officers medically unavailable for full duty by 9 percent, meaning that we have 21 more full-duty officers that we did a year ago. Of even more significance, the number of officers on extended sick leave has dropped 27 percent, from 81 a year ago to 59 currently. This means we have 22 more officers who have transitioned to limited duty, performing desk assignments at MPD, as opposed to staying home on sick leave. Right now, approximately 6 percent of our sworn members are medically unavailable for full duty, compared to 7 percent in 2004 and 11 percent in 2003.

These improvements have been the result of new protocols to monitor and evaluate sick leave and limited duty status; better management of behavioral health cases, particularly those involving claims of stress; the imposition of discipline, when appropriate; and reforms passed by the Council. The discipline has included firing members on extended sick leave who were absent without official leave for extended periods of time either because they failed to show up for their appointments at the Police and Fire Clinic or failed to return to work when they were medically cleared to do so by Clinic doctors.

We also continue to closely monitor our use of overtime and use it judiciously. While the total number of overtime hours did increase by about 10 percent between fiscal year 2004 and fiscal year 2005, court overtime hours declined by more than 20 percent. In fact, court overtime has declined 59 percent since fiscal year 2000. We continue to work with the court system in trying to bring down

the amount of time that officers spend in the courthouse, so they can spend more time out on the street. In fact, last year's rise in total overtime hours was largely the result of an increase in reimbursable details, including three meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, the 2005 Presidential Inauguration, Hurricane Katrina and Nationals baseball games.

Since our last performance hearing, our Department has issued a revised organizational chart. The changes do not affect the basic structure of patrol and investigative operations. The current system of PSAs, Districts and Regional Operations Commands remains intact. However, there are a number of changes to specialized operational, research and general support functions that are designed to streamline and improve Departmental operations. For example, the new Office of Security Services includes the School Safety Division, Youth Violence Prevention Section and Cadet Training Unit. We have consolidated several traffic-related functions into a new Traffic Safety and Special Enforcement Branch. We created a Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Section within the Special Operations Division, and established a Policy and Program Development Division, which focuses on such areas as risk management, program development and internal directives. Various existing elements have been renamed or transferred within the organizational structure. Organizationally, I believe our Department is in excellent shape to continue our progress in reducing crime, enhancing neighborhood safety and improving service and efficiency.

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I have reported today on a number of positive trends in the MPD's performance in recent years. I want to close my testimony by trying to put these trends into a broader context.

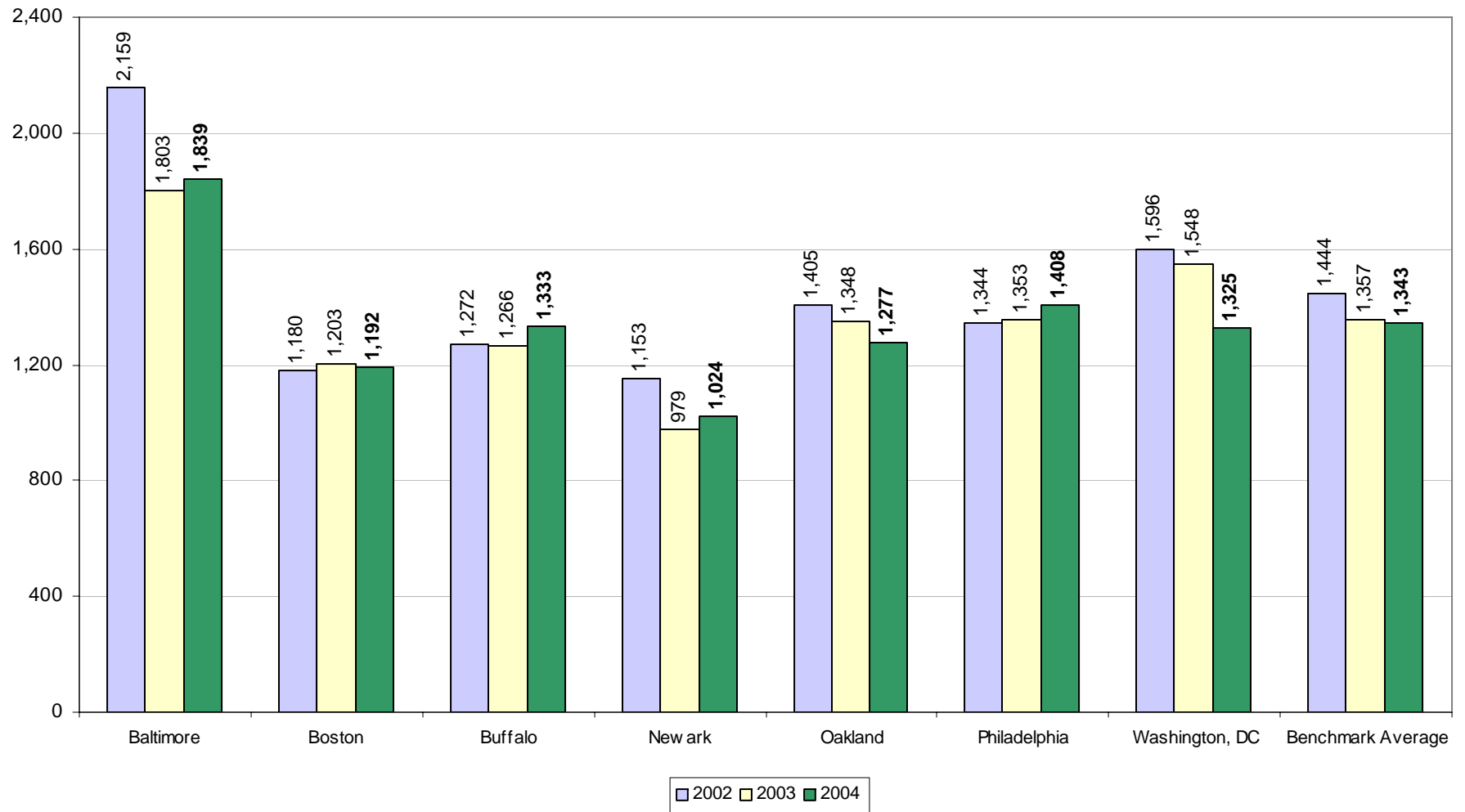
Three years ago a few DC government agencies – including the MPD – were asked to launch a “benchmarking” effort to assist in the budget development process. The goal was to inform decision-makers about how well agencies are operating and to identify areas in need of improvement, by comparing agency results with those of comparable jurisdictions. Our Department developed a comprehensive methodology to select seven jurisdictions that are similar to DC in terms of demographic, socio-economic and law enforcement agency characteristics. Based on this analysis, seven jurisdictions were found to be the most similar to DC: they are Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Newark, Oakland and Philadelphia. Staff has been tracking our Department's performance in several key areas against the results in these comparable cities.

And the findings have been very encouraging. Between 2002 and 2004, DC experienced sharp reductions in both violent and property crime rates. In the benchmark cities, the trend was either uneven or not nearly as dramatic as in DC. In 2002, both our violent and property crime rates were second highest among the benchmark cities (Baltimore had the highest rates). By 2004, both our violent and property crime rates were below the average for all of the benchmark cities. Our property crime rate in 2004 was second lowest, behind only Philadelphia. We found similarly positive trends in our homicide clearance rate, which exceeded the benchmark average in 2004, and in the rate of intentional firearm discharges by officers.

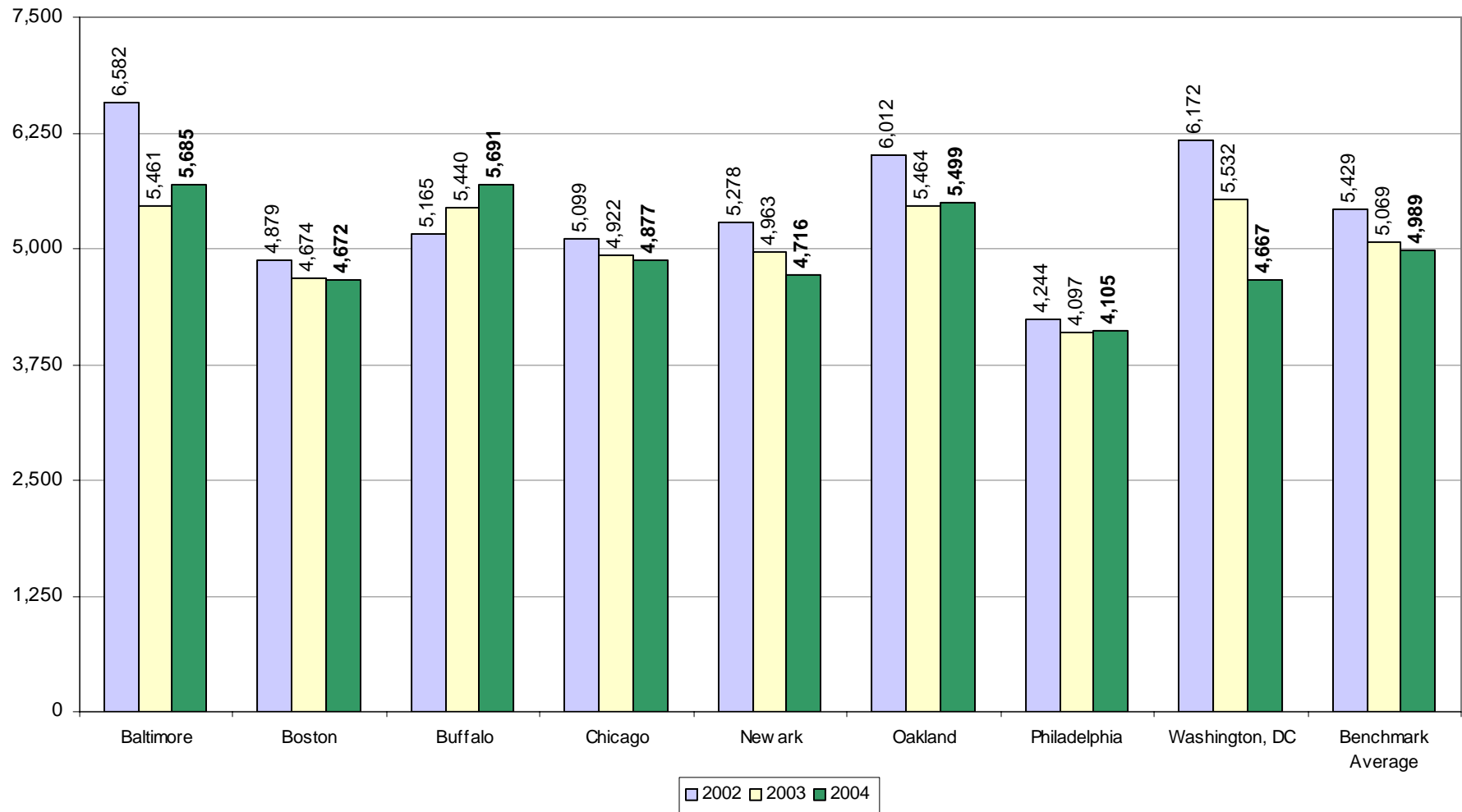
What the benchmarking analysis demonstrates is that not only has the our Department and our city made significant progress in reducing crime and improving critical police services – these improvements cannot be explained simply by general changes or trends that are affecting all cities. When it comes to public safety, we are doing some things very well here in the District of Columbia, and we have the results to show for our efforts. All of us – our elected leaders, our police officers and the communities we serve – can be proud of what we have accomplished, working together.

Thank you. My staff and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

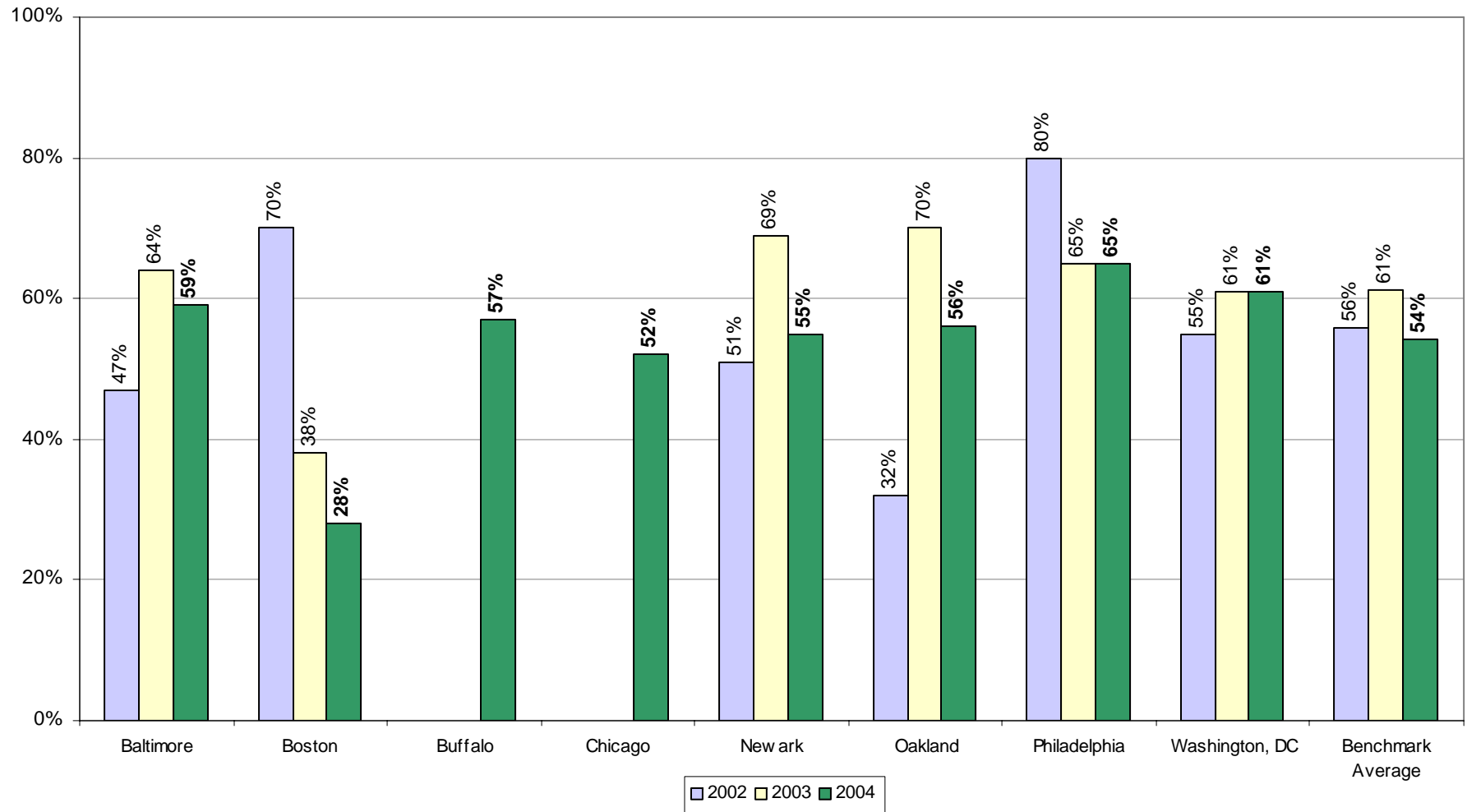
Number of Part 1 Violent Crimes per 100,000 Residents (2002-2004)



Number of Part I Property Crimes per 100,000 Residents (2002-2004)



Homicide Clearance Rates (2002-2004)



Rate of Intentional Firearm Discharges per 1,000 Sworn Members (2003-2004)

